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February 13, 2022

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From U.S. to Honduras: Socialism and Black Liberation

By John Parker

On Jan. 27, I was fortunate to be one of a handful of delegates from the U.S. to attend the historic inauguration of President Xi-omara Castro in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Representing the Socialist Unity Party, I was part of an international delegation invited by President Castro and her Libre Party, founded by the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP).

For the first time in 12 years, the people – service workers, factory workers, agricultural workers, unemployed workers, communities of African ethnicity and Indigenous communities – were also invited to participate.

That's a reflection of the policies and actions already taking place under the new administration, employing a path in line with socialist economic goals. In fact, in the first five days of Castro's presidency, she wiped out the electric bills of a million working and poor people in Honduras, in addition to ending much of the school tuition that also helped keep the poorest of the population destitute.

In addition, Castro's priority of ending the privatizations that have wreaked havoc on the environment – especially for Indigenous communities struggling to maintain clean water – is already being implemented.

Early on the morning of the inauguration, lining up to get into the stadium in Tegucigalpa, our 20-person international delegation witnessed the excitement and joy of the sea of people, some of whom had traveled far, and some of whom had slept there overnight to get good seats.

The gravity of this event was reflected in its open rejection of capitalist and imperialist policies, and, with the multi-ethnic diversity we saw in attendance, a rejection of racism.

Since I'm writing this during Black History Month, as a Black person I want to pose the question: Would the victory of a genuine socialist brought about by a grassroots struggle have the same beneficial effects on the Black, Brown and Indigenous populations here in the U.S.?

And, if so, does the inauguration of Castro show the importance of the struggle for socialism for Black/African liberation in the U.S. and abroad?

Militant mobilization in the streets

Socialists and communists have long been a part of the Black struggle for liberation in the U.S., although hidden behind a wall of racist erasures in history books, state repression and anti-communist propaganda.

Today, the mantra from the ruling class, echoed by liberal politicians, nonprofits and educational institutions, is that the struggle cannot be in the streets, only electoral. It especially cannot challenge the ownership of a very small minority of billionaires and their institutions who hold the major industries of manufacturing, war, finance, education and health care in their possession.

In Honduras, however, although this was an electoral victory, it was made possible only by militant activism in the streets and growing organization of working-class and nationally oppressed sectors to challenge the

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From U.S. to Honduras: Socialism is

vital to Black Liberation

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Today, the mantra from the ruling class, echoed by liberal politicians, nonprofits and educational institutions, is that the struggle cannot be in the streets, only electoral. It especially cannot challenge the ownership of a very small minority of billionaires and their institutions who hold the major industries of manufacturing, war, finance, education and health care in their possession.

In Honduras, however, although this was an electoral victory, it was made possible only by militant activism in the streets and growing organization of working-class and nationally oppressed sectors to challenge the frantic drive toward privatization that characterized the years since the 2009 coup.

The U.S. government supported the overthrow and kidnapping of then-President Manuel Zelaya with money and technical know-how. Zelaya, a socialist who was democratically elected in 2006 and is the husband of President Castro, defied U.S. imperialism by refusing to accept a cabinet chosen by the U.S. Embassy. He refused to abide by the policies of austerity and anti-communism demanded by Western

monopoly banking institutions.

Like President Castro, Zelaya sought to make qualitative changes in favor of the working class shortly after becoming president. He raised the minimum wage of workers by 60%, infuriating Wall Street banks, the Obama Administration and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

U.S. support continued with the military coup's targeting and killing of progressive activists, while also making Honduras the poorest country in Latin America. Repression and economic devastation drove waves of emigration by desperate refugees, who were then demonized and brutalized when they tried to enter the U.S.

Still, a very strong youth movement grew in number and influence during the last 12 years, led by socialist youth. After the coup they put their lives in danger with militant protests. Many belong to the Libre Party and some are actually part of the Castro administration.

Their militance was an echo of that of the Indigenous communities, as represented by slain activist and Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres, whose photo was enlarged on the stadium walls in her honor during the inauguration.

Unity of workers and oppressed

It was that type of militancy in the streets and unity with the oppressed that culminated in the electoral victory of Xiomara Castro. And that unity continues. It will be needed, because the U.S. continues to occupy major military bases in Honduras, and is already plotting to undermine the new government with its right-wing allies.

At the inauguration, I spoke with a member of one of the Black community organizations that received a special invitation to attend and participate in the ceremony.

There are two groups in Honduras of African ethnicity. One is the Garifuna people, an Afro-Indigenous community. The other group lives near the Bay Islands and on the Honduran coast of the Caribbean sea. Because of British colonialism preceding the ownership of their lands by Honduras, these are English-speaking Black communities.

“We are the Black English-speaking people, we are located in the Bay Islands mainly, we are in La Ceila, Puerto Cortez and Puerto Castilla. We are actually the only group of Black English-speaking people in Honduras. And for many years many people didn’t even know we existed because we had been so excluded,” the community representative explained.

“But today, with the government of President Xiomara Castro, it was one of her goals that the Indigenous and Afro groups be present in this historical moment. It’s the reason we are here today showcasing a little bit of who we are, because many don’t even know that we are one of the nine ethnic groups that exist in Honduras, since we once belonged to the British government.”

About a week after the inauguration, it was announced that – for the first time – a member of the Garifuna community, Dr. Luther Castillo Harry, who studied at the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in Havana, Cuba, was appointed secretary of Science, Technology and Scientific Innovation by President Castro.

Socialist activism in the U.S.

Claudia Vera Cumberbatch, who changed her name to [Claudia Jones](#), also had roots in the Caribbean. She was born in 1915 in Trinidad, and came to Harlem in 1924 where she began advocating for socialism. Jones’ advocacy was so threatening to the ruling class here that she was later deported for her communist activism before she could get citizenship.

She described her experience as a Black woman: “It was out of my Jim Crow experiences as a young Negro woman, experiences born of working-class poverty, that led me in search of why these things had to be, that led me to join the Young Communist League and to choose at the age of 18 the philosophy of my life – the science of Marxism-Leninism — that philosophy that not only rejects racist ideas but is the antithesis of them.”

Jones saw the crisis of working people as a direct result of capitalism in its modern stage of imperialism: “Imperialism is the root cause of racialism. It is the ideology which upholds colonial rule and exploitation. It preaches the ‘superiority’ of the white race whose ‘destiny’ it is to rule over those with colored skins, and to treat them with contempt. It is the ideology which breeds fascism, rightly condemned by the civilized people of the whole world.”

Jones, whose analysis is so relevant to today’s struggles against white supremacy and the rise of fascist forces, is just one of the many socialist voices of Black peoples in the U.S., starting as early as 1904 with the Rev. G.W. Woodbey in his books “The Bible and Socialism” and “The Distribution of Wealth.”

Woodbey, born in 1854, was a member of the Socialist Party of America, and saw the struggle for socialism as a next step after the struggle against slavery and key to fighting racism and economic exploitation.

Then there are George Jackson, Lucy Parsons, W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson, just to name a few of the Black historical figures from the U.S. who advocated the economic system of socialism.

So yes, Honduras provides further evidence that Black liberation is tied to the struggle for socialism.

Other examples include the independence of 17 African countries from European

colonial bondage during the 1960s, due to the military and financial support of the Soviet Union and China; or, here in the U.S., the rise in power of the union movement in the 1930s and 1940s, eventually greatly benefiting Black workers due to socialist/communist leadership and their growing influence; or the defense of Black workers in the South during the Great Depression by communists; or the fact that our very own Assata Shakur is alive and well, in spite of the U.S. bounty on her head, protected by Cuba's revolutionary socialist government.

Claudia Jones expands on this in her comments that take into account not only national oppression, but also women's oppression: "For the progressive women's movement, the Negro woman, who combines in her status the worker, the Negro and the woman, is the vital link to this heightened political consciousness.

"To the extent, further, that the cause of the Negro woman worker is promoted, she will be enabled to take her rightful place in the Negro-proletarian leadership of the national liberation movement and, by her active participation, contribute to the entire American working class, whose historic mission is the achievement of a Socialist America — the final and full guarantee of woman's emancipation."

Anyone who tells you that socialism is not relevant to our struggle as Black people either has no clue about our history or does not want to see any real struggle against this racist system of exploitation, poverty and war.

But, in spite of the lies the ruling class and their collaborators throw at us, the struggle for liberation will continue. Just ask the people of Honduras.

John Parker is the Socialist Unity Party candidate for U.S. Senate in California, running on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. Learn more and how to get involved in his campaign at [Socialist4Senate](https://www.socialist4senate.org).



The terrible fate facing the Afghan people

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 13, 2022

On February 8, 2022, UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) Afghanistan [sent out](#) a bleak set of tweets. One of the tweets, which included a photograph of a child lying in a hospital bed with her mother seated beside her, [said](#): "Having recently recovered from acute watery diarrhea, two years old Soria is back in hospital, this time suffering from edema and wasting. Her mother has been by her bedside for the past two weeks anxiously waiting for Soria to recover." The series of [tweets](#) by UNICEF Afghanistan show that Soria is not alone in her suffering. "One in three adolescent girls suffers from anemia" in Afghanistan, with the country [struggling](#) with "one of the world's highest rates of stunting in children under five: 41 percent," according to UNICEF.

The story of Soria is one among millions; in Uruzgan Province, in southern Afghanistan, measles cases are [rising](#) due to lack of vaccines. The [thread](#) to the tweet about Soria from UNICEF Afghanistan was a further bleak reminder about the

severity of the situation in the country and its impact on the lives of the children: “without urgent action, 1 million children could die from severe acute malnutrition.” UNICEF is now [distributing](#) “high energy peanut paste” to stave off catastrophe.

The United Nations has, meanwhile, [warned](#) that approximately 23 million Afghans—about half the total population of the country—are “facing a record level of acute hunger.” In early September, not even a month after the Taliban came to power in Kabul, the UN Development Program [noted](#) that “A 10-13 percent reduction in GDP could, in the worst-case scenario, bring Afghanistan to the precipice of near universal poverty—a 97 percent poverty rate by mid-2022.”

The World Bank has not [provided](#) a firm calculation of how much of Afghanistan’s GDP has declined, but other indicators show that the [threshold](#) of the “worst-case scenario” has likely already passed.


When the West fled the country at the end of August 2021, a [large part](#) of the foreign funding, which Afghanistan’s GDP is dependent on, also vanished with the troops: 43 percent of Afghanistan’s GDP and 75 percent of its public funding, which came from aid agencies, [dried](#) up overnight.

Ahmad Raza Khan, the chief collector (customs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan, [says](#) that exports from his country to Afghanistan have dropped by 25 percent; the State Bank of Pakistan, he says, “introduced a new policy of exports to Afghanistan on December 13” that requires Afghan traders to show that they have U.S. dollars on them to buy goods from Pakistan before entering the country, which is near impossible to show for many of the traders since the Taliban has [banned](#) the “use of foreign currency” in the country. It is likely that Afghanistan is not very far away from near universal poverty with the way things stand there presently.


On January 26, 2022, UN Secretary-General António Guterres [said](#) that “Afghanistan is hanging by a thread,” while pointing to the 30 percent “contraction” of its GDP.

Sanctions and dollars

On February 7, 2022, Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen [told](#) Sky News that this perilous situation, which is leading to starvation and illness among children in Afghanistan, “is not the result of our [Taliban] activities. It is the result of the sanctions imposed on Afghanistan.”

On this point, Shaheen is correct. In August 2021, the U.S. government [froze](#) the \$9.5 billion that Afghanistan’s central bank (Da Afghanistan Bank) held in the New York Federal Reserve. Meanwhile, family members of the victims who died in the 9/11 attacks had sued “[a list of targets](#) ,” including the Taliban, for their losses and a U.S. court later [ruled](#) that the plaintiffs be paid “damages” that now amount to \$7 billion. Now that the Taliban is in power in Afghanistan, the Biden administration seems to be [moving forward](#) “to clear a legal path” to stake a claim on \$3.5 billion out of the money deposited in the Federal Reserve for the families of the September 11 victims.

The European Union followed suit, [cutting](#) off \$1.4 billion in government assistance and development aid to Afghanistan, which was supposed to have been paid between 2021 and 2025. Because of the loss of this funding from Europe, Afghanistan had to [shut](#) down “at least 2,000 health facilities serving around 30 million Afghans.” It should be noted here that the total population of Afghanistan is [approximately 40 million](#), which means that most Afghans have lost access to health care due to that decision.

During the entire 20-year period of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, the Ministry of Public Health had come to [rely](#)  on a combination of donor funds and assistance from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). It was as a result of these funds that Afghanistan saw a [decline](#) in infant mortality and maternal mortality rates during the Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010. Nonetheless, the entire public health

care system, particularly outside Kabul, struggled during the U.S. occupation. “Many primary healthcare facilities were non-functional due to insecurity, lack of infrastructure, shortages of staff, severe weather, migrations and poor patient flow,” [wrote](#) health care professionals from Afghanistan and Pakistan, based on their analysis of how the conflict in Afghanistan affected the “maternal and child health service delivery.”

Walk along Shaheed Mazari Road

On February 8, 2022, an Afghan friend who works along Shaheed Mazari Road in Kabul took me for a virtual walk—using the video option on his phone—to this busy part of the city. He wanted to show me that in the capital at least the shops had goods in them, but that the people simply did not have money to make purchases. We had been discussing how the International Labor Organization now [estimates](#) that nearly a million people will be pushed out of their jobs by the middle of the year, many of them women who are suffering from the Taliban’s restrictions on women working. Afghanistan, he tells me, is being destroyed by a combination of the lack of employment and the lack of cash in the country due to the sanctions imposed by the West.

We discuss the Taliban personnel in charge of finances, people such as Finance Minister Mullah Hidayatullah Badri and the governor of the Afghanistan central bank Shakir Jalali. Badri (or Gul Agha) is the money man for the Taliban, while Jalali is an expert in Islamic banking. There is no doubt that Badri is a resourceful person, who developed the Taliban’s financial infrastructure and learned about international finance in the illicit markets. “Even the smartest and most knowledgeable person would not be able to do anything if the sanctions remain,” my friend said. He would know. He used to work in Da Afghanistan Bank.

“Why can’t the World Bank’s Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) be used to rush money to the banks?” he asked. This [fund](#), a partnership between the World

Bank and other donors, which was created in 2002, [has](#) \$1.5 billion in funds. If you visit the ARTF website, you will receive a bleak [update](#): “The World Bank has paused disbursements in our operations in Afghanistan.” I tell my friend that I don’t think the World Bank will unfreeze these assets soon. “Well, then we will starve,” he says, as he walks past children sitting on the side of the street.

This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#). Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. He is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at Globetrotter. He is the chief editor of [LeftWord Books](#) and the director of [Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research](#). He is a senior non-resident fellow at [Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies](#), Renmin University of China. He has written more than 20 books, including [The Darker Nations](#) and [The Poorer Nations](#). His latest book is [Washington Bullets](#), with an introduction by Evo Morales Ayma.



Virtual Tribute: Alicia Jrapko Vive |

A Life of Struggle for a Just World, March 5

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 13, 2022



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Biden's promise to appoint first Black woman to Supreme Court

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 13, 2022

During a Democratic presidential debate on March 16, 2020, candidate



Joe Biden said: "If I am elected president and have an

opportunity to appoint someone to the courts, I would appoint the first Black woman to the court. It is required that they have representation. Now! It is long overdue.”

[Biden first made the promise](#) at a press conference in South Carolina on Feb. 26, 2020, when he accepted Rep. James Clyburn’s endorsement. Biden said he would be honored to appoint the first African American woman to the Supreme Court.

There he said: “The corridors of powers [should] reflect what America looks like – that includes the White House, that includes the staff there. That includes the Cabinet and that includes the Supreme Court and the Congress.”

U.S. Supreme Court seats have historically been filled only by white men – 115 of the 121 Supreme Court justices, or 95% of all appointments. There have been only three white women, two Black men and one Latina. But no Black women.

At the time he made his pledge in early 2020, Biden was fighting for the Democratic Party presidential nomination and was losing the battle. The pledge was forced on this most conservative of establishment Democratic candidates by the struggle of the masses for representation, which intensified with the George Floyd rebellion a few months later.

Biden saw no choice but to promise to address the historic lack of representation of Black people, especially Black women, in this powerful institution.

Hundreds of thousands nationwide were screaming “Black lives matter, reparations now!” Black people were dying of COVID-19 at a higher rate than whites, police were killing Black people indiscriminately, jobs were being lost, student debt continued to grow, people faced evictions, and white supremacists were coming out of the shadows, led by number-one tyrant President Donald Trump.

Securing Black women’s support

What was Biden to do to win? He made promises to the people, specifically African American women, to choose a woman vice-president and appoint a Black woman to the highest court in the U.S. It helped him win the South Carolina Democratic primary, signaling a shift in his fortunes, even though there was no guarantee there would be a Supreme Court seat vacancy.

Bernie Sanders and other Democratic candidates began to drop out of the race. Biden won the nomination - which left him and Trump as the candidates of the two major capitalist parties. His promise was so profound that it helped ensure that an estimated 93% of Black women registered voters came out and cast their vote for Biden in November 2020.

Biden became the 46th president of the U.S. in January 2021. A year later, in January 2022, Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer announced his plan to retire.

Biden had an opportunity to wriggle out of his promise at a press conference, like he has broken so many of his other campaign pledges. Instead he announced: "The person I will nominate will be somebody with extraordinary qualifications, character, experience and integrity. That person will be the first Black woman ever nominated to the United States Supreme Court."

What was Biden thinking? Could it be that he does not really know how deeply seated racism and white supremacy are in the United States?

Once Biden's promise became a reality, the haters came out. Biden could have said he was going to nominate the best person to succeed Justice Breyer and then appointed a Black woman. Did Biden make a mistake by reiterating his campaign promise, or was all this media attention part of the plan?

The arguments being made in the media against affirmative action in relation to Biden's announcement are purely based on racism, trying to sell this as a reasonable

argument to the masses of people. The burden of all these racist attacks is going to fall on whichever Black woman Biden appoints, during the confirmation hearings and possibly long after her confirmation.

The truth is, Supreme Court appointments have always been primarily political appointments, not based solely on merit or experience as a judge. The president can appoint whoever he or she wants, and the Senate has the power to approve or disapprove. It is rare that the Senate does not approve a presidential appointee.

The Black woman Biden chooses will surely possess all the qualities required of a Supreme Justice. The number-one qualification required of the appointee is to “uphold the Constitution at all costs.” No one would do this with more sincerity, honesty and conviction than Black women, who have so long been denied their rights.

Constitution and slavery

For its time, 230 years ago, the U.S. Constitution was “one of the most revolutionary documents, that ... affirmed a form of government never seen before in the history of humanity, that ... was the very paragon of democracy and accorded equal rights to all” under the law – at least in theory. (Sam Marcy, [“Two contradictory trends in U.S. politics”](#))

Yet how is it that a key institution of this new government was the Supreme Court, which can invalidate the rights of the majority of the people in this country?

As Marcy explained, it was established as a court of last resort for the rich and powerful. “Whenever the bourgeoisie is in a crisis, they will let nine people, unelected, appointed for life, decide the most critical issues concerning life in the United States.”

The first seven Supreme Court justices appointed by George Washington were slave

owners or came from slave-owning families. This is no surprise since Washington was a slave owner himself and in that period chattel slavery was legal. For the elite of this new state, slaves were needed to carry out the hard labor, keep up the living quarters and tend to the needs of the rich whites. No way could they function without slaves.

The “Founding Fathers,” including some who would number among the original seven justices, struggled with how to address slavery. They did not explicitly write the word “slavery” in the Constitution, but included key clauses protecting the institution, including the fugitive slave clause and the three-fifths clause.

Harriet Tubman knew that President Abraham Lincoln was not an abolitionist. His main interest was preserving the Union. Tubman knew that she had to continue to free as many enslaved people as humanly possible.

She had the opportunity to meet Lincoln, to wait in line to meet with him. This would have been an historic moment recorded in history, but she chose not to go. Harriet Tubman, a fugitive slave, served in the Union Army during the Civil War. In the end she had to fight to get compensation in the form of a small pension for her service.

Throughout history, Black women have fought to truly extend the rights stated in the Constitution to every person in the U.S.

A political institution

We know that the appointment of a liberal Black woman will not tip the scales while six right-wing justices stand firm in their opposition to women’s reproductive rights. The U.S. Supreme Court will remain in the position to give a heavy blow to the women’s movement. Reversing *Roe v. Wade*, agreeing with the narrow option of abortion only up to 15 weeks, or leaving the decision up to individual states, will place a heavy burden on all oppressed and working-class women in the United

States.

We need to change the way Supreme Court justices are chosen. These individuals should be democratically elected by the people with defined qualifications and term limits.

The bottom line is that this is all political. We all know that the time is long overdue for a Black woman to be on the Supreme Court and that the words Biden spoke are true.

Biden's long political career includes his role in the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee. I remember the 1991 confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas, especially the awful treatment of Anita Hill, who testified about Thomas' history of sexual harrassment.

Biden chaired the confirmation hearings and had an opportunity to do the right thing, but he did not want to subpoena the two additional women that could have brought more evidence to support Hill's claim.

Now, in 2022, he had an opportunity to appoint a Supreme Court justice with extraordinary qualifications, character, experience and integrity; to make history without all this drama.

Instead, he may find himself apologizing to another Black woman for stealing the fire and dampening the spirit of the first Black woman associate justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.



Racism + COVID = death

written by Struggle - La Lucha

February 13, 2022

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared that “of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”

The COVID-19 pandemic is more proof Dr. King was right. Death rates from the virus are at least double in Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities.

Zip code 11369, which comprises the East Elmhurst neighborhood in Queens, New York, is a shocking example. Dr. King was a student preacher there at the First Baptist Church at 100-10 Astoria Blvd. Malcolm X and his family lived at 23-11 97th St.

[One out of every 119 people](#) in this Black and Latinx neighborhood have died of the coronavirus. That’s over three times the U.S. average. It’s equivalent to 2.8 million people having died of COVID across the United States.

Diseases don’t discriminate, but capitalism does. The capitalist world market was born with the African Holocaust and the holocaust of Indigenous peoples in the

Americas. The number-one job of the \$4 trillion U.S. medical-industrial complex is producing profits, not healing.

In 2020, nurses at Mount Sinai's flagship hospital in New York City had to wear Hefty garbage bags to protect themselves against COVID-19. Meanwhile, Mount Sinai's CEO Kenneth Davis was enjoying his [\\$12 million pay package](#).

Ten nurses at the Providence St. John's Medical Center in Santa Monica, California, [were initially suspended](#) for refusing to work in COVID wards without personal protective equipment.

Big pharmaceutical outfits like Pfizer don't foresee vaccinating a billion Africans until 2024. That's vaccine apartheid, similar to the denial of retroviral therapies for HIV/AIDS to Africans for a decade after they were being used in the U.S.

Millions of people died as a result. Andrew Natsios – head of the U.S. Agency for International Development under President George W. Bush – thought it was useless to provide help to Africa. The drugs were to be taken at certain times of day and [Natsios claimed in 2001](#) that Africans “don't know what Western time is.”

Poverty and oppression kills

COVID-19 has acted like a killing machine in overcrowded housing and among essential workers. Black, Indigenous and Latinx people are concentrated in both.

High rents force families to live in cramped apartments. Families that are evicted often move in with relatives. Now the bans on evictions have been lifted and landlords want to throw millions of people onto the street.

Who is more crowded than the 2.2 million people in the prisons? As of Feb. 9, 564,451 prisoners have been infected with COVID and [2,814 have died](#). Why isn't Donald Trump locked-up?

Prisons are concentration camps for the poor. In Wisconsin, Black people account for around 6% of the population but 46% of the prison inmates. In the same states Black babies are five times more likely to die than white infants.

The entire United States was stolen from Indigenous nations. In the Navajo nation there have been [1,626 deaths](#) from COVID.

Over 59,000 meatpacking workers were infected with COVID. At least [269 workers died](#). Just at the JBS plant in Greeley, Colorado, six workers died. The vast majority of these workers were Black, Latinx and/or immigrants.

In the New York City area, [over 150 transit workers died](#) of the coronavirus. The Metropolitan Transit Authority there at first refused to allow workers to wear masks, claiming it was a violation of dress codes.

Socialism vs. capitalism

While the United States has a little bit more than 4% of the world's population, it has accounted for [almost one-fifth of all COVID-19 cases](#).

Uncle Sam accounts for about the same percentage of the world's prison inmates. Both statistics show what U.S. capitalist "democracy" really amounts to.

One of the reasons so many people have died of COVID-19 has been the binge of hospital closings in the U.S. This has gone hand-in-hand with the thousands of factories being shut down.

Twenty thousand of the hospital beds thrown away were in New York state, according to the New York State Nurses Association. Among them was Harlem's Sydenham Hospital, which was closed in 1980 after a bitter struggle to keep it open.

Some of the closed health facilities, like the Hahnemann University Hospital in

Philadelphia, are being turned into luxury housing.

Thousands of nursing home patients died of COVID. A big cause was that elderly hospital patients with the virus were shoved into nursing homes due to the shortage of hospital beds.

Despite the cruel U.S. economic blockade of Cuba, not a single hospital or school has been closed in the socialist country. For every 1.9 hospital beds available in Brooklyn and Queens, there are 5 available in Cuba.

Pfizer and Moderna sold the overwhelming amount of their life-saving vaccines to richer countries. Socialist China and Cuba are sharing their vaccines with the world.

China will distribute 2 billion vaccine doses to Africa, Asia and Latin America. Cuba has already sent 10 million doses to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and plans to distribute another 100 million doses.

No parents in Cuba have to wait eight hours with their children in crowded emergency rooms before seeing a doctor. No one in that beautiful country is turned away from a clinic because they don't have insurance.

That's because health care in Cuba is considered a human right, not something to make a profit from. Cuba has what we need: socialism.



Cuba battles COVID, defying 60-year U.S. blockade

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 13, 2022



Presentation by Sharon Black, writer for Struggle-La Lucha and national spokesperson of the Socialist Unity Party, at the Cuba online forum Feb. 9, 2022.



Europe for

End the U.S. blockade of Cuba

It has been 60 years this month since U.S. President John Kennedy first proclaimed Executive Order 3447, prohibiting “the importation into the United States of all goods of Cuban origin and all goods imported from or through Cuba.”

Feb. 7, 1962, marked the beginning of the U.S. blockade of Cuba. Its stated purpose was to inflict collective punishment on the Cuban people in an attempt to starve and suffocate the young Cuban Revolution.

Every U.S. administration, regardless of party affiliation, has continued this policy, in one form or another. Not because Cuba represents a security risk for the United States, but because the Cuban socialist project is a beacon for not only Latin America and the Caribbean, but for the world's people.

Biden, who promised to continue the Obama administration's loosening of restrictions on Cuba, reversed himself and expanded Trump's draconian policies.

The changes during the Obama administration were based on pragmatism, not ethics or principle. U.S. policies which included not only the blockade, but invasions and terrorist attacks, had not worked and only served to isolate the U.S.

What hasn't changed is the motive of U.S. imperialism to continue to strangle the island nation.

The COVID pandemic and its consequent suffering became an opportunity to not only reignite the former course, but to attempt to go further.

It is no secret that National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the CIA and non-profit organizations orchestrated a highly-coordinated destabilization campaign to create chaos and promote demonstrations in the streets against the Cuban government. They were unsuccessful.

U.S.-Cuba Friendshipment Caravan

On Nov. 15, 2021, I and two other Struggle-La Lucha reporters, Ellie McClain and Lars Bertling, traveled to Cuba as part of the 31st IFCO-Pastors for Peace U.S.-Cuba

Friendshipment Caravan.

Our group was one of the first delegations to travel to the newly reopened Cuba, which had been closed to international visitors because of the pandemic. Nov. 15 marked the opening of schools and services in Cuba and was also a day celebrating the anniversary of Havana.

We are from Baltimore, Maryland, where the police murder of Freddie Gray sparked a rebellion of the people of our city who were fed up with racist police terror.

Our members also represent the Peoples Power Assembly, which does community work, including setting up weekly free food distributions because our government won't feed the people, and also a "saving lives campaign" to demand vaccines for our community.

Among our own organizers, six people contracted COVID-19, four were hospitalized, and six other volunteers died. Only 60% of the people of Baltimore are vaccinated.

We know the Cubans like to say, "We are not perfect." But what we saw is heaven to us in comparison to our conditions under capitalism.

Our participation was as much to learn from the Cuban people as it was to show our solidarity in demanding an end to the blockade.

We stayed close to two weeks in Cuba, spending almost every minute visiting hospitals, clinics, schools, museums and especially participating in discussions with Cuban representatives on almost every aspect of Cuban life, from trade unions, to conditions of African descendents, artists and writers, and especially the deeply-damaging impact of the U.S. blockade. We met with Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) students and members of the Henry Reeve Brigade for international medical solidarity.

Finlay Vaccine Institute

Given our own experience with the lack of medical care in the U.S. and the sacrifice of so many lives because of the inability of the U.S. capitalist system to provide care, I wanted to underscore our visit to the Finlay Vaccine Institute.

The institute helped to produce three of Cuba's five COVID-19 vaccines: Soberana, Soberana 2 and Soberana Plus.

Under the most difficult conditions due to the blockade, Cuba was able to produce these three highly effective vaccines, rivaling the effectiveness of U.S. vaccines. The blockade had prevented Cuba from importing the reagents necessary for the production of the vaccine. And international patent restrictions blocked Cuban scientists from sharing important information.

In addition, it was nearly the first time that Cuba had to produce a vaccine aimed at a virus rather than a bacterial infection - and they were able to do it in record time. So you might consider it a miracle.

So how did they do it?

One of the major reasons given was the cooperation between Cuban organizations, the lack of competition and personal profit. In fact, these were some of the same reasons, along with a few others, for the high vaccination rate in Cuba that has now reached an astounding 90% of the population.

The people of Cuba trust the vaccines because the country has a long history of preventative health care that is steeped in education and community implementation. There is no profit motive to block health care in Cuba.

U.S. movement in support of Cuba has grown

In contrast to Biden's cynical and criminal attempts to choke and destroy Cuba, the sentiment of the people inside the U.S. to end the blockade has grown.

On Sunday, Jan. 30, Miami Cuban-Americans and their supporters gathered at City Hall to caravan with bikes and cars to a rally at the statue of Cuba's national hero, José Martí.

Over nearly two years, these monthly Miami actions have birthed a caravan movement across the U.S. and internationally on the last Sunday of the month - including in the streets of Cuba. Caravans kicked off the new year in Miami, New York City, Minneapolis, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Tempe/Phoenix, Portland, Seattle and Los Angeles.

No U.S./NATO war on Russia and Donbass

We cannot end our presentation without strongly condemning U.S. imperialist attempts to ratchet up war in Ukraine. What is taking place is a deadly game that only benefits U.S. imperialism.

The U.S. rulers created this crisis and continue to pour fuel on the fire day by day.

The global capitalist system is in crisis. While some billionaires and sectors have profited handsomely from COVID, U.S. imperialism's overall profits and strategic dominance are threatened at every turn.

In particular, the oil industry - thoroughly entwined with the biggest U.S. banks and the military-industrial complex - has been in crisis for over a decade. U.S. capitalists are desperate to stop the nearly completed Nord Stream 2 pipeline project slated to bring Russian gas to Europe.

Washington's actions in the Ukraine are not only aimed at the Donbass republics and Russia, but also Venezuela and Cuba, who have cooperative relationships with

Russia.

In the United States, the fear of widening war has stirred the anti-war movement.

Struggle-La Lucha and the Socialist Unity Party, along with many other groups including Code Pink, called for national days of protest. We have demanded no war on Russia and Donbass. It is our responsibility to energetically reach out to the workers and poor in the U.S. and explain why a war on Russia and Donbass is not in our interest.

No U.S/NATO war on Russia and Donbass! End the U.S. blockade of Cuba!



Teachers in Puerto Rico strike for wages, benefits

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 13, 2022

On Wednesday, February 9, teachers across Puerto Rico called for a national strike to protest the government and the Fiscal Control Board's (FCB) cutting of wages and

pensions. Other public sector workers, namely firefighters and police, have also joined them. Teachers are demanding a decent salary, an end to pension cuts, and the resignation of Puerto Rican governor Pedro Pierluisi.

Maestros en [#PuertoRico](#) exigen al gobierno un salario justo y que se respete su retiro.

Para este miércoles han convocado a un nuevo Paro Nacional de docentes al que se unieron también Bomberos, Policías y otros sectores sociales.

iCOMPARTE! pic.twitter.com/qCiPf3gp5f

— Luis De Jesús (@ldejesusreyes) [February 9, 2022](#)

Teachers have been protesting since February 4. That same day, the FCB imposed by the US Congress that has been in charge of Puerto Rico since 2016, was boasting because it supposedly already put the end of the bankruptcy process on track by approving a plan negotiated with the big bondholder funds. The plan contains a meager raise of \$470 for teachers in the public system, divided in two stages. The “Ukrainian-American” Natalie Jaresko, Executive Director of the FCB, expressed her surprise at the massive protest that took place precisely when, for the first time in more than ten years, a salary increase for teachers was announced.

A esta hora, cientos de maestros y maestras paralizan las calles de San Juan en una nueva movilización para exigir salario digno y respeto a su retiro. A su reclamo también han sumado el pedido de renuncia del gobernador Pedro Pierluisi. [#PuertoRico](#) pic.twitter.com/67rRAj1P2f

— Luis De Jesús (@ldejesusreyes) [February 9, 2022](#)

In fact, the massive teachers' protest on Friday, February 4 was a surprise to more than just her. The action which saw the vast majority public school workers walk off the jobs was not called for by the union that officially represents them, the Teachers Association, nor by any nationwide organization. Thousands gathered on the south side of the Capitol in San Juan from where they marched to Fortaleza, crowding the streets of the old city, while others organized protests in different parts of the country. A large number of students joined the marches or held solidarity demonstrations in their own schools.

Así está el ambiente a esta hora en San Juan. Cientos y cientos de maestros y maestras en las calles exigiendo salario digno y justo.

¿Será este el comienzo de un Verano del 2022 en [#PuertoRico?](https://twitter.com/ufyhYhExHA)
[pic.twitter.com/ufyhYhExHA](https://twitter.com/ufyhYhExHA)

— Luis De Jesús 🇵🇷🇵🇷🇵🇷 (@ldejesusreyes) [February 9, 2022](#)

However, anyone who has lived in Puerto Rico during the last decade, or has been following the news during that time, cannot express surprise at the outbreak of protest on February 4, nor for those that will surely come in the coming months. The accumulation of social grievances is a process similar to the heating of volcanoes before they erupt.

During the last twelve years, no Puerto Rican public employee has received a salary increase. In the case of public corporations, which negotiate collective bargaining agreements and whose employees have the right to strike, the FCB took control of their finances five years ago. All previous negotiations between the government as employer and its employees were at the mercy of the Board. During that long period, which still persists, everyone who works for any public entity had their salary frozen.

Así está el ambiente a esta hora en San Juan. Cientos y cientos de maestros y maestras en las calles exigiendo salario digno y justo.

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[pic.twitter.com/ufyhYhExHA](https://twitter.com/ufyhYhExHA)

— Luis De Jesús 🇵🇷🇵🇷🇵🇷 (@ldejesusreyes) [February 9, 2022](#)

As for the so-called “benefits”—healthcare, vacations, sick days, retirement, etc.—the situation is even worse. It used to be said that public employees earned less than others in the so-called private sector, but, unlike the latter, they were guaranteed a retirement pension, along with other benefits. All of that disappeared or changed as of 2016 and, right now, no one in the public system has any certainty about what the future holds.

Workers in the so-called private sector have not been having a better time. The minimum wage that companies must pay did not change during that long time, while legislated benefits were reduced. In 2017, mandated by the FCB, a so-called “labor reform” was imposed that limited overtime pay, made working hours more flexible, made firing workers cheaper and easier, increasing precariousness for all. At the beginning of 2021, the Legislature which was elected the previous year initiated a process aimed at restoring some of these rights, but so far nothing has been done.

Empleados de la rama judicial de Puerro Rico también se han unido a las protestas contra el gobierno.<https://t.co/qMagjPpE1A>

— Luis De Jesús 🇵🇷🇵🇷🇵🇷 (@ldejesusreyes) [February 9, 2022](#)

While this process of dispossession is taking place, unfettered capitalism continues

its course. The press informs us that inflation continues unabated and that the latest increase in the prices of the so-called “basic basket” (the products indispensable for living) is the highest in the last thirteen years. For food products, the increase was 17%, while gasoline and other petroleum products shot up to 30%. Every year we have suffered increases, but the last one has been worse. Those of us who live in Puerto Rico, and especially those who work in the public sector, have to face this continuous increase in the cost of living, while salaries stagnate or are reduced, and benefits disappear.

"NO ROBES MI RETIRO"

Exigen los maestros y maestras de Puerro Rico, junto a otros sectores públicos...

☐☐ pic.twitter.com/U8GzCwXkYd

— Luis De Jesús ☐☐☐☐☐ (@ldejesusreyes) [February 9, 2022](#)

The government must defend teachers

Earlier this month, the Popular Front for the Defense of Public Education (FADEP) demanded that both the Legislature and the Executive Branch have the backbone to defend teachers against the Fiscal Control Board (FCB) and to approve bills that will guarantee dignified retirement, a salary increase, and compensation for professional studies.

The bills supported by the Front are PS 873, which guarantees compensation for professional studies to all teachers in Puerto Rico; P of C 513, which raises the base salary to \$2,700 for all teachers in Puerto Rico, and P of C 1136 to condition the issuance of bonds in the Debt Adjustment Plan, to guarantee zero cuts and zero freezes to present and future pensions.

The Front is made up of the unions Puerto Rico Teachers Federation (FMPR), UNETE and EDUCAMOS. The unions made their demands in the midst of a caravan held last Friday, which departed from the old headquarters of the Department of Education, passed by the Teachers' Retirement System, the Federal Court, and concluded at the Capitol. Once at the Capitol, the spokespersons of the Front were received only at the offices of Senators María de Lourdes Santiago, of the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), and Rafael Bernabe, of the Citizen Victory Movement (MVC), who are in favor of the bills, as confirmed to *CLARIDAD* by Mercedes Martínez, president of the FMPR. The Front will be lobbying the rest of the legislators this week.

"The legislature and the governor have clearly defined whose side they are on, and it is not on the side of the working people. They had in their hands the ability to stop the Board through PC 1003, later approved in Act 53, and they did not know how to take advantage of it. Thanks to their decision, they allowed the approval of the Debt Adjustment Plan, which will mean misery for the people of Puerto Rico and, in the case of teachers, implies draconian cuts to teachers' pensions. That is why, beyond empty words, we demand commitment on your part in the approval of the aforementioned bills and the backbone to defend them before the dictatorial Board. The teachers are paying attention, they are organizing and will do whatever they have to do to defend their retirement," indicated the leaders of the FADEP, composed of Mercedes Martinez of FMPR, Liza Fournier of UNETE, and Migdalia Santiago of EDUCAMOS.

From the Capitol they went to La Fortaleza, where they were received by the governor's economic development advisors, Yamil Ayala and Yolanda Rodríguez. The advisors promised on January 31 that they would communicate with them to let them know Fortaleza's decision on the three projects. In addition, Martínez revealed that the advisors promised to coordinate a meeting for Wednesday, February 3, with the director of the Government Retirement Board, Luis Collazo Rodríguez, to discuss the

particular case of the teachers.

In addition to waiting for the governor's response, the spokeswomen asked to speak with the governor to request "a meeting without intermediaries, with someone who can make a decision, in this case, the governor. As long as this does not happen, we will continue to escalate our efforts in the streets with the teachers of this country".

Meanwhile, Migdalia Santiago, president of EDUCAMOS, stressed: "It is time to achieve justice for a sector so mistreated and marginalized by all the administrations that have governed the island. We will celebrate 14 years in February without a salary increase to the base scale, and now, on top of that, they are running over us with a pension of indigence. We are not going to accept this, so we are going to defend ourselves with all the means at our disposal".

The president of UNETE stated, "This is shameful, outrageous and that is why we will be fighting the battle from all fronts: the Legislature, the Executive, the federal court, including the most important front: the street."

The teacher movement leaders pointed out that their battle did not end with the caravan. They are organizing the teachers, school by school, in assemblies, consultations and other activities that they will be announcing soon.

The projects demanded by the Front should not be confused with the Control Board's announcement that it granted a conditional raise to teachers. Martinez indicated that the Department of Education (DE) asked the Board for an increase of \$1,000, for which it identified the funds. The Board cut this figure to less than half (\$470).

This increase was also rejected by the leader of the Teachers Association (AMPR) recognized by the Department of Education. In a press release, the president of the Association, Víctor M. Bonilla Sánchez, said he was disappointed and assured that

this constitutes a “crumb” compared to what active teachers will lose after the Debt Adjustment Plan goes into effect.

“We met with the Board and indicated to them that, at a minimum, this raise should bring the teachers’ base salary to \$3,500 to at all compensate for what our educators will lose with the freezing of their retirement benefits. Today we are surprised with this proposed increase, which is very little, and, to top it off, it comes with conditions that seem absurd to us,” Bonilla Sanchez said.

The Association indicated that the FCB’s proposal would raise the teacher’s base salary to \$2,220 monthly. But the proposal splits the effective date of the raise to teachers into two phases. The first phase would be granted in July of this year and the second, in January 2023, would be conditional, depending on fulfilling a 90% digital attendance record for teachers and students. The president of the AMPR indicated that the Board’s proposed increase does not even match the efforts being made in the Legislature to bring the teachers’ base salary to \$2,700. Bonilla Sanchez insisted that the Board and the Government must identify sources of funding to achieve true salary justice to educators.

The English version of this article from [Claridad Puerto Rico](#) was done by Natalia Marques.

Source: [Peoples Dispatch](#)



Across the U.S., protests demand 'No war on Russia and Donbass!'

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 13, 2022

On Feb. 5, anti-war and community organizations took to the streets across the United States in a united demand to the Biden administration: No war on Russia!

It was a crucial moment of visible opposition to the rapid U.S./NATO war buildup that has marked the first weeks of 2022.

An ad hoc coalition of anti-imperialist organizations, including the Socialist Unity Party and Struggle-La Lucha newspaper, Solidarity with Novorossiia and Antifascists in Ukraine, longtime Minneapolis antiwar activist Alan Dale, Women Against Military Madness, the Communist Workers League and Workers Voice Socialist Movement first put out the call for ["National Days of Action Feb. 4-12: No War on Russia and Donbass! U.S./NATO Out of Ukraine!"](#)

"Biden claims that there is an imminent threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine,"

says the call to action. “But the real invasion threat stems from U.S.-allied Ukraine against the independent Donbass republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, near Russia’s western border.

“Washington and its NATO partners have been pushing Ukraine’s government to invade Donbass, hoping to provoke a response from Russia that can cover further NATO expansion. Ukraine has deployed 125,000 troops [now more than 150,000] to the ceasefire zone, including battalions of neo-Nazis, armed with NATO weapons.

“Poor and working people are wracked with crisis after crisis here at home. ... We need a struggle to end racism and poverty, not another criminal war abroad!”

The national call was endorsed by the Anti-War Committee, Alberto Lovera Bolivarian Circle, International League of Peoples’ Struggle – U.S. chapter, Freedom Road Socialist Organization, Peoples Power Assembly, Moratorium Now Coalition, Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice and others.

Shortly after, Code Pink: Women for Peace made its own call for a national day for “negotiations, not war” with Russia on Saturday, Feb. 5. Other anti-war formations, including the ANSWER Coalition, Peace Action, United National Antiwar Coalition, Veterans for Peace and International Action Center, also mobilized.

In many cities, the groups joined forces for united anti-war activities.

‘Bring the troops home’

In **New York City**, the anti-imperialist coalition organized a speak-out Feb. 5 at Columbus Circle. [Hundreds of fact sheets](#) were distributed to passersby while protesters chanted: “Hands off Russia! Hands off Donbass! Bring the troops home!”

At the speak-out, activists explained that the U.S. and NATO pose the real invasion threat to the Eastern European region. They also contrasted the massive flood of

U.S. weapons to Ukraine in recent weeks with the Biden administration's failure to provide promised N95 masks to people here during the omicron COVID surge.

Speakers included Johnnie Stevens of Parents to Improve School Transportation (PIST NYC), Michaela Martinazzi of NY Community Action Project (NYCAP) and International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS), Teri Kay of Communist Workers League and Greg Butterfield of Solidarity with Novorossiia and Antifascists in Ukraine.

The protesters then held a small but spirited march down Broadway to join the rally called by Code Pink at Times Square. The group entered chanting, "Hey hey, ho ho, NATO has got to go," helping to set a militant tone for the second event.

[Bill Does spoke](#) at the Times Square rally representing Struggle-La Lucha. He said, "The health care system is collapsing, millions are facing eviction, people are drowning in student debt, Congress can't pass the Build Back Better Act - but they have endless money for war and destruction. Because only war and destruction can preserve the domination of Wall Street and the U.S. dollar in the world economy. And they're willing to risk global destruction for that purpose."

Other speakers included Margaret Kimberley of Black Alliance for Peace and Larry Holmes of Workers World Party.

'Fight fascism and white supremacy'

In **Los Angeles**, a broad coalition of anti-war forces rallied at the downtown Federal Building.

[John Parker](#), candidate for U.S. Senate in California representing the Socialist Unity Party and Peace and Freedom Party, spoke about his recent visit to Honduras as part of a solidarity delegation to celebrate the inauguration of leftist President Xiomara Castro. He described the parallels between the people's struggles against

fascism and white supremacy under the U.S.-backed coup regimes in Honduras and Ukraine.

“The regime created by the coup in Ukraine in 2014 with U.S. support bans communist and socialist organizations, but they allow Nazi collaborators to be lauded. The FBI finally admitted that some of the white supremacists who were in Charlottesville in 2017 went to Ukraine for training. Then they come back here and attack us. That’s the link, and we have to explain it to people here.”

Organizers from Parker’s Senate campaign said they plan to distribute more fact sheets about the U.S./NATO war danger as they hold neighborhood outreach events.

In **San Diego**, Socialist Unity Party activists visited several locations to distribute fact sheets and talk to organizers about the importance of building the anti-war struggle, including at San Diego State University, Malcolm X Library, Black Resource Center, World Beat Cultural Center, City Heights Library and the Centro Cultural de la Raza.

A rally and car caravan drew about 30 protesters in **Baltimore**. Bright green signs declared, “Banks and Big Oil profit from Pentagon wars” and “Money for healthcare, not for fascists and war profiteers!”

Despite frigid temperatures, 70 people came out in **Minneapolis** to demand “No war on Russia” at the call of Minnesota Peace Action Coalition, Anti-War Committee, Veterans for Peace, Women Against Military Madness and others.

The protesters then joined with hundreds of others marching to demand justice for Amir Locke, a young Black man slain by Minneapolis police days before.

Two actions were held in **New Orleans**. The Workers Voice Socialist Movement held a mass leaflet distribution. “Whether it’s at bus stops, grocery store parking lots, or barber shops, we need to get the word out: We workers have no interest in another

bloody war for the rich,” the group explained.

At Congo Square, Freedom Road Socialist Organization, ANSWER Coalition, the Communist Party of Louisiana and others rallied against war on Russia.

Protests were held in dozens of other cities Feb. 5, including **Washington, D.C.; Des Moines, Iowa; Topsham, Maine; Kansas City, Missouri;** and **Missoula, Montana.**

In **Detroit**, the Moratorium NOW! Coalition and Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice are planning a rush-hour protest on Friday, Feb. 11. Visit the [Facebook event page](#) for details.

With reports from Sharon Black in Baltimore, John Parker in Los Angeles, Greg Butterfield in New York and Gloria Verdieu in San Diego.

SLL photos: Sharon Black, Maggie Vascassenno, Greg Butterfield



Railroad workers under attack

written by Struggle - La Lucha

February 13, 2022



A common sign in sweatshops back in 1900 was "If you don't come on Sunday, don't come on Monday." At the Sparrows Point steel mill outside Baltimore, employees worked 84 hours a week. Their only days off were Christmas and July 4th.

Fast forward to 2022. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway is trying to impose a harsh new attendance policy. It could get workers fired for taking off just five holidays during their entire decades-long career.

Workers will be punished for being absent no matter what the reason. Every BNSF employee will be assigned 30 points.

Except for vacation days, two points will be deducted for being absent on any day from Monday through Thursday. Three points will be taken away for taking off on a Sunday.

Workers will be fined four points if they don't come in on Friday or Saturday. Federal holidays are the grand prize. Being sick those days will get a worker seven points.

Many days of overtime will be required to regain any points.

What makes this new policy all the more outrageous is that it's being pushed through during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 900,000 people have died of the virus in the United States.

Even the capitalist courts that railroad poor people to jail claim to consider people innocent until proven guilty. The BNSF will automatically penalize workers who "mark off" even if they or their children are ill.

People get sick on holidays, too. Most transportation workers don't have Monday through Friday work weeks. Neither do millions of workers in hospitals, restaurants and other 24-7 workplaces.

Railroad workers aren't covered under Social Security. They get benefits from the Railroad Retirement Board instead and have to work 30 years to get the maximum. Some work 40 years or more.

BNSF executives want to be able to fire workers anytime during their careers, even for those with a 25-year good work record. Their new attendance policy will allow them to do it.

Under collective bargaining, such a drastic change in attendance policy is supposed to be subject to negotiation – not just imposed by management.

A union grievance – which on railroads is called a time card – would describe it as being "arbitrary and capricious." Those words describe BNSF's dictator-like change of policy.

Federal Judge Mark Pittman, who was appointed by Trump, [ruled that unions can't strike](#) over this issue. That's also an act of a dictator.

Job cuts = death

BNSF is one of six giant railroad outfits in the United States and Canada. It operates more than 32,000 miles of track in 28 western and midwestern states as well as British Columbia and Manitoba in Canada.

Yet there are only 35,000 workers that make the system's trains go from Chicago and Texas to California and the Pacific Northwest. The number of U.S. [railroad workers has fallen](#) from 1.5 million in 1947 to [just 145,000 today](#).

That's a 90% cut in employment. And it's why billionaire Warren Buffett invested in BNSF, as he told Bloomberg Businessweek magazine in a 2010 interview. The money bags smelled profits from railroads killing over a million jobs.

BNSF is now a subsidiary of Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway financial empire. With his [\\$114 billion fortune](#), Buffett doesn't have to worry about calling in sick.

What does it mean when nearly 1.4 million railroad jobs are destroyed? Hundreds of thousands of Asian, Black, Indigenous and Latinx men and all women were denied a chance to get jobs from which they were excluded. Charles Hamilton Houston, who mentored U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, fought court battles against apartheid hiring by railroads.

Hamlet, North Carolina, was an important center of the old Seaboard Railroad. It still has a yard for CSX Transportation, which like BNSF is the result of mergers. Hiring opportunities are slim because of massive job elimination.

Instead of getting railroad jobs, local workers got low-paying jobs at Emmett J. Rowe's chicken plant. Twenty-five workers were murdered there on Sept. 3, 1991,

because of an avoidable fire and locked doors.

Rowe locked the doors because he thought workers, many of whom were Black, would steal chickens. White and Black workers were killed by Rowe's racism. Eighteen women died. Forty-nine children were orphaned.

Dozens of other railroad towns were devastated. They included Paducah, Kentucky, where the Illinois Central shops were closed, and Livingston, Montana, home to the former Northern Pacific shops.

Thousands of railroad jobs were lost in the New York City area. Among them were workers on the many ferries that used to carry freight cars from Hudson County, New Jersey, to terminals on the west side of Manhattan.

The elimination of these ferries and docks forced more trucks into New York City streets. It allowed luxury housing to be built at Battery Park City on Manhattan's waterfront. Donald Trump sold condos at Riverside South on top of the former 60th Street yards.

Reparations not strikebreaking

These massive job losses don't mean railroads are going out of business. In 2018, U.S. railroads [carried 13.6 million carloads of freight](#). Trains carrying shipping containers from seaports are a vital part of the global supply chain.

BNSF isn't going broke either. In 2019 it collected [\\$5.5 billion in net income](#), another term for profit.

So why are BNSF and the rest of the railroads increasing their attacks on workers? They want to go back to the days of the 19th century railroad tycoon Jay Gould, who bragged he could hire one-half of the working class to shoot the other half.

Today's railroad kings want to reduce railroad crews to just one person. Having a one-person crew resulted in the 2013 Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, train wreck in which 47 people were killed.

Instead of attacking workers, BNSF should be paying reparations.

The U.S. Army massacred Indigenous people on behalf of western railroads. General Custer died for the Northern Pacific Railroad, which was one of the rail lines that became the Burlington Northern Santa Fe.

Nine thousand miles of track were built by enslaved Africans in the South before the Civil War. Thousands more miles were built afterwards by imprisoned Black people being used as slave labor.

Among them was John Henry, the "steel-driving man" who was worked to death building the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, which is now part of CSX.

Railroad monopolies think they can steamroller workers. The 1926 Railroad Labor Act makes it difficult for workers to fight back.

Today's Congress can't pass a bill to protect voting rights. But in 1991 it broke the last coast-to-coast strike within 24 hours.

An Amtrak yardmaster told this writer that when he worked for the Norfolk Southern Railway, a trainmaster demanded that he do stretch exercises. It was like the worker was still in kindergarten.

The arrogance displayed by the trainmasters is despised by workers. Union members are demonstrating with their families against the BNSF anti-family policy. Railroad workers will fight back.

The writer is a retired Amtrak worker.

